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Perceptions And Expectations Of Residence Halls

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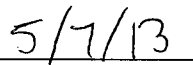
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Perceptions and Expectations of Residence Halls

By:

Christopher M. Hardin

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Education

In the graduate school, Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, Illinois

2013

I hereby recommend that this thesis be accepted as fulfilling
this part of the graduate degree cited above

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my family who are the reason I am here today and completing a master's degree. To my mom, thank you for your continual support throughout my educational career. Your influence on me believing in the good that education can do is the reason I am finding myself so enthusiastic about working in the field of higher education and having the opportunity to work with developing minds. Without you in my life I don't know where I would be and your continual support of my efforts has allowed me to follow the path I believe I was meant for.

To my dad, thank you for always showing me that no matter what happens in your past, you can always find another chance and make something out of your life. Your ability to share your trials and tribulations throughout life has helped me so much as I've grown as a person. You have always been there for me and challenged me to a better person that I ever believed I could be. Your ability to challenge me and your high expectations of me helped me to remember to have high expectations of myself.

Finally, to my brother, thank you for always being the role model that I needed in my life. Growing up with you by my side every step of the way was an influence that I could never explain in words. You were the person I wanted to be when I grew up and you were the role model who helped shape the person I've become today. I could not have asked for a better brother in my life and you have had such an impact on my life.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined perceptions of the residence halls, how those changed over the course of the first semester living in a residence hall, and how the residence halls were meeting the needs of the students. The experimenter utilized the past literature of Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993) regarding vectors of student development and the work on human needs written by Abraham Maslow (1943). Nine undergraduate students were randomly chosen during orientation days and interviewed about their perceptions of campus. Two follow-up interviews occurred to examine how perceptions changed over the course of a semester. Participants initially expressed concern with issues regarding physiological, safety, and love/belonging needs. The love/belonging needs became the main concern in both the second and third interviews. Participant satisfaction in the residence halls was strongly tied to the relationships formed pre-enrollment with other students and staff members. Research indicated the potential importance of student affairs professionals helping to create avenues of pre-enrollment relationships in improving overall satisfaction.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The satisfaction of first year students is an important and necessary goal for any institution of higher education. Efforts to increase retention rates start by creating involved and engaged students on a university campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Creating campus environments that promote students' engagement presents many challenges to institutions today. The environments, from the physical to the virtual, encompass how students will interact with opportunities afforded to them (Strange & Banning, 2001). Each contributes to an overall attitude of a student toward an institution. The formation of attitude is an element that cannot be overlooked when discussing issues of retention and satisfaction (Quinn, 2009). To understand the formation of an attitude of a first year student on a college campus, one must first understand the preconceived notions the student has of college as well as the first impressions gained from campus visits, online investigation, peer-to-peer conversations, among other avenues of information. Strange and Banning (2001) discussed the importance of these first impressions stating, "From the view of the prospective college students, the physical features are often among the most important factors in creating a critical first impression of an institution" (p.12). The physical environment discussed by Strange and Banning still plays a key role, but with the advent of technology and social media, we are seeing the elements of physical environment merging with the virtual environment. The task of universities is to ensure the message, however it is communicated, is providing a consistent image of what is being offered to prospective students.

In the wake of the internet boom, many students are basing their judgments solely off what is found through university websites among other resources (Noel-Levitz, 2011). This

newly created emphasis on the virtual environment means students are creating first impressions in a new way. Universities must examine their online and marketing personas to see if the environments presented to prospective students are matching those students experience once they arrive on campus (Kowarski, 2010). If this environment is giving off conflicting verbal or nonverbal messages compared to student experience on campus, student satisfaction could falter at the university (Kowarski, 2010). Understanding how perceptions are formed and validated is important in understanding what makes students decide to stay at the institution.

Glancing at most university websites shows that institutions are attempting to sell students on the benefits of living on campus. For example, when going to the website of University of Northern Iowa, on campus living is promoted through charts and graphs showing higher grades, higher graduation rates, friend making, avoiding money hassles, building leadership skills, and making college life easier overall (University of Northern Iowa, 2013). Consider that the 2008 Digest of Education Statistics published by the National Center for Education Statistics showed a total enrollment of 3,024,723 first time freshmen students. The 2010 U.S. Census showed that around 2 million students were living on-campus. As many universities are requiring first year students to live on campus, a great deal of their acculturation to the university comes through the residence halls. One of the most cited reasons why students should live on campus is the grade point average differences between people living on-campus and people living off-campus (Astin, 1973,1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Studies showed the benefits of on-campus living included an academic atmosphere and higher graduation rates (Astin, 1973,1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). In addition, an increase in personal growth was found when comparing people from the residence halls were

compared with people living off campus (Astin, 1973,1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993).

Statement of Purpose

This study looked at students' pre-enrollment attitudes regarding residence halls in comparison to their attitudes once they have lived in the residence halls for part of a semester. The pre-enrollment attitudes are an important part of understanding the expectations students have of their life on campus and in the residence halls. After understanding their expectations, studying how the institution is meeting those expectations can be determined and better understood. Reviewing both the pre- and post-perceptions helps in understanding student experience and satisfaction, ultimately leading to greater retention.

Research Questions

The major themes of the study revolved around three major questions.

Research Question #1: What is student perception of residence hall life before entering the institution?

Research Question #2: How do residence hall perceptions differ from pre-enrollment to mid-semester?

Research Question #3: How does the residence hall experience meet the needs (expectations) of the students?

Limitations

This qualitative study was limited to one campus which makes it difficult to generalize the results. The study focused on student participation and honest answers reflecting how well needs were met as revealed in individual interviews. Participant responses may have been influenced by a variety of things outside of the institution and researcher's control.

The researcher brings bias into the equation through participation in the interview and leading the direction of that group. The researcher also spent all four years living on campus and works in the residence halls. Having an awareness of how these experiences impact the research being conducted is important in order to be sensitive to different student experiences. Being aware of and accounting for bias make the study more credible.

Operational/Conceptual Definitions

A physical university environment is defined by Strange and Banning (2001) as, “The basic layout of the campus, open spaces and shaded lawns, the accessibility and cleanliness of parking lots, interior color schemes, the shape and design of a residence hall or classroom building, a library or gallery, an impressive fitness center, and even the weather” (p.28). While a virtual environment is defined as an environment consisting of the use of social media, the use of the internet, and any form of computer-mediated communication. Computer-mediated communication is, “an umbrella term for the use of computers to support human communications” (Santoro, 1995, p. 65).

Student needs will be evaluated based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, which consists of five distinct categories of needs. These needs are physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization.

Students’ perceptions, “are defined as students’ points of view that indicate their reactions and satisfactions toward their residence hall living environment” (Alkandari, 2007).

Physiological- physical requirements necessary for survival such as air, water, and food.

Safety- safety can refer to several different types of security including health/wellness, financial security, and personal security.

Love- the feeling of belongingness through friendship, intimacy and family.

Esteem- the human desire to be accepted and valued by others, which also increases the self-esteem and self-respect of self.

Self-Actualization- “What a man can be, he must be” (Maslow, p. 91). The desire to become everything a person is capable of becoming, reaching full potential.

Residence Hall- The residence hall encompasses the responsibilities of the dormitory (sleeping, safety, storage) while incorporating the higher developmental and educational needs of the student.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In order to better understand student perceptions of the residence halls, the base of student development theory will be reviewed with a focus on the work of Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993). The work of Abraham Maslow (1943) will also be covered to identify the specific needs that human beings seek to fulfill to reach the highest level of satisfaction. In addition to these two theories, literature will be reviewed to give an understanding of impression formation and how it relates to the residence halls. An inclusion of literature regarding the current population in the residence halls will be reviewed as well as prior works discussing the role of the residence halls on college and university campuses.

Student Development Theory

A research foundation based in theory is a necessary first step to establishing the direction a study is hoping to take. The research performed in this study is based off of the work of two major theorists who have made an impact in their respective fields. The first, Abraham Maslow, wrote a paper in 1943 titled *A Theory of Human Motivation*, which first introduced the idea of a Hierarchy of Needs. The other is Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser, the former a noted researcher in the field of student affairs and the latter a graduate student, who wrote the second edition of *Education and Identity* in 1993 which outlined seven vectors of student development.

Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs consists of five different levels of needs. In the model, it is necessary for lower needs to be met before higher needs are able to be achieved. The lowest of needs is the physiological, consisting of those things that are necessary for a human

being to survive. When basic physiological needs are met, Maslow (1943) discussed that the next level as the safety of the individual could be attained. The safety consists of the body of the individual, possessions gathered, morality, and the family among a list of safety concerns (Maslow, 1943). The third level discussed the idea of love/belonging with particular attention paid to the ideas of friendship, family, and sexual intimacy (Maslow, 1943). After the needs are met in each of the previous categories, the individual can progress to the level described as esteem. The fourth level looks at the self-esteem of the person as well as the respect given to others and received from others (Maslow, 1943). The final level Maslow discussed is the level known as self-actualization, which focuses on how a person begins taking steps to reach one's full potential. The final stage is far more broad and individualized than the others because reaching full potential can mean something very different to each person.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory is a foundation for looking at what students in college need from the institution to achieve self-actualization. Evaluating institutions according to how effectively these needs are being met allows for a clearer picture of where institutions are succeeding and where they may be missing the boat. Maslow provides a foundation with which to see if these essential needs are being promoted to students. If those needs are promoted by an institution, the next step is to see if they are being delivered or received by students. Colleges and universities often sell an image of a clean, comfortable, and safe living environment for students to pursue their academic endeavors. When students arrive on campus to find something opposite, such as dirty buildings, unsafe environments, or uncomfortable living spaces, the success and development of the student could be inhibited.

In discussing development of students, it is necessary to establish what lens we are using to evaluate student development. For the purpose of this study, the theory Chickering and

Reisser (1993) established in the second edition of *Education and Identity* will be utilized. The theory proposed by Chickering and Reisser (1993) focused on seven vectors, which build on each other, but are not restricted to sequential order of progression. The first vector described is known as developing competence. Take for example a college freshman in their first group project of college. A student in this stage is still learning how to communicate effectively with others, thus may struggle to express ideas and critically think about the ideas others present (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The second vector is known as managing emotions. A college freshman living with a roommate for the first time may struggle with developing this relationship and may struggle in managing their emotions. Learning to deal appropriately with emotions such as avoiding blowups by dealing with irritations early, dealing with fears before they immobilize, and healing emotional wounds before they infect other relationships are key areas that are a sign a person has a reasonable grasp of the vector (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The third vector is known as moving through autonomy toward interdependence. In this stage, a college freshman is likely to have come from high school, having a very structured curriculum and ordered process. The increase of free time puts new students in a position to learn how to become autonomous, directing their own learning processes through interdependence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The fourth vector is developing mature interpersonal relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students who arrive on college campuses from smaller towns may have dealt with a population similar in beliefs, race, ethnicity, etc. The college experience, especially living in a residence hall, provides opportunities for interacting with people different than the student. A student struggling to express tolerance or respecting differences is most likely still moving through the vector. The fifth vector is establishing identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). A college freshman challenged by the differing views expressed

by those around them is likely to reflect on their own viewpoints. That reflection can be likened to affirmation or deferring to different viewpoints they evaluate to be superior. An example that often comes up is the religion of an individual. Fostered in an environment surrounded by people of the same faith provides a stable support that may not exist in the same way when the person attends college. Considering other viewpoints becomes essential in developing one's own identity. The sixth vector is developing purpose (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). The discussion of changing majors encompasses the development of purpose many students feel as they come into college. Attempting to figure out a future path, a student is likely to begin searching for meaning and what purpose they want to fulfill in the future. Taking steps to find that major is a development in understanding and practicing foresight (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The final vector is developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). An incoming student may have moral thinking based on parental teaching or another source. As these are challenged by individual cases, that individual will learn to live their values and understand how they apply in action. Creating congruence between values and actions is a defining factor of the vector (Chickering & Reisser 1993).

Impression Formation

Robert Weygand, (2002) president of the New England Board of Higher Education, described the importance of first impressions stating:

First impressions are said to be among the most important. Job interviewers often make hiring decisions within the first five minutes of meeting a candidate. More than half of voters, it is said, judge political candidates by their appearance. Consumers may select a car by the way it looks before they know anything about how it runs. The same has been true of how students and their families choose a college or university (p. 11).

As the statement reveals, first impressions are among the most important impressions that can be made upon a person, especially choosing a university. The first impression today can be made in a variety of ways and institutions in this highly competitive market must be conscious of these various modes for connecting with potential students (Weygand, 2002). Seeing first impressions as vital is essential to any college or university seeking to positively affect enrollment of students. An equally important task is to understand how impression formation occurs within people.

The idea of first impressions is that they are made relatively quickly and can be among the most effective ways of determining the institution a student wants to attend (Weygand, 2002). Authors Nalini Ambady and John Skowronski (2008) discussed four separate parts to the formation of first impressions including the biological processes, the accuracy of first impressions, the effects of facial cues in impression formation, and the effects of behavioral and environmental cues on impression formation. The section of the effects of facial cues in impression formation will not be focused on due to its irrelevance to the topic at hand.

The biological processes discussed include, “an argument for the adaptive benefits of spontaneous inferences and how specific evolutionary pressures lead perceivers to biases that maximize their ability to choose loyal allies and to protect themselves from dangerous enemies” (Quinn, 2009, p. 299). The process of creating impressions occurs by focusing on a variety of different approaches including the “use of visual and dynamic stimuli rather than written verbal stimuli, recognizing the role of the perceiver and the social context; acknowledging the interactivity of target, perceiver, and contextual cues” (Quinn, 2009, p. 300). This may also include finding new ways to spice up the on campus experience in previewing the institution.

The accuracy of first impressions focuses on contributing factors to accuracy, including the “intentions, emotional states, and social relations” (Quinn, 2009, p.300) of people as they are forming the impressions. It is important for residence hall staffs to be aware of these intentions, emotional states, and social relations of incoming students to most effectively help in the development of students. Seeking to understand the goals, emotions, and intentions of a student coming to the institution is important to understanding how that person will form their impression, including how the institution can effectively reach the person.

The final section discusses the effects of behavioral and environmental cues on impression formation. The section corroborates with Strange and Banning (2001), stating that “physical environments, virtual environments, social relations, and personal preferences provide residues that lead to behavioral inferences and/or about social category membership, which in turn lead to dispositional inferences” (Quinn, 2009, p. 300). The two sources focus on the impact of the physical environment on the overall experience a person has, beginning with the formation of their first impression.

Millennial Generation Characteristics

Impression management and branding are important in their own right, but understanding the target population helps shape each for colleges and universities. The current generation has been labeled using several categories including Millennial, the Net Generation, and Digital Natives (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998). Characteristics associated with today’s college students include a feeling of individual specialness, overall sheltered upbringing, confidence, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and high achieving individuals (Howe & Strauss, 2002). As the terms Net Generation and Digital Natives also imply, the generation has become quite adept to using and becoming

familiar with technology (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). The infusion of new technologies at a consistent pace has made adaptation an important part of living in the newest generation.

Whether that technology is email, smart phones, or the internet in general, the Millennial Generation has been on the forefront of integrating those technologies into their lives (Junco & Mastrodicasa 2007).

The importance of these characteristics for colleges and universities lies in the type of marketing that takes place as well as the mediums being considered most effective (Noel-Levitz, 2011). Take for example a college administrator considering the current generation being very active on the internet as the only characteristic to consider when advertising. The easiest way to reach many people would be mass advertising on a heavy traffic website such as Facebook, yet this ignores other important components of the Millennial Generation. The idea of a person looking to be considered special may cause a mass advertisement or mass email to be ignored, as the person does not feel appreciated. Looking into exactly how colleges and universities are branding themselves to prospective students is an important task to understand the target population.

Residence Halls

“Our residence halls are far more than a place to sleep. Residents create an active community and learn from each other outside the classroom environment. We emphasize accountability, personal responsibility, and involvement in our halls, and we have a staff in place to help students succeed” (Clinton Community College, 2013). The quote from the website of Clinton Community College is one of many that can be found by simply looking at the pages of colleges and universities alike, attempting to sell residence halls as a necessary service to supplement learning.

Prior research done has shown that residential living during college is consistently one of the most important determinants of a college student's level of involvement or integration into the various cultural, social, and extracurricular systems of the institution. Compared to their counterparts who live at home or commute to college, resident students have significantly more social interaction with peers and faculty and are more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities and to use campus facilities (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1996).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) cited that one of the greatest impacts that can be made comes from students' campus involvement. In comparing these benefits with Maslow's Hierarchy, a picture of how the residence hall can meet these needs through staff intentionality becomes clearer. The residence hall provides an area to sleep, eat, and is ideally a safe living environment for students. The physiological and safety needs are addressed by the environment created in these ways. The final three levels of love, esteem, and self-actualization involve social interaction and the building relationships to fulfill each to reach one's full potential. Campus integration is more likely for students who are living on campus and ultimately can give on campus students more opportunities to fulfill the needs of love, esteem, and self-actualization (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling 1996). The final three levels tend to be of greater importance to students, but are of less control to the staff as they are based on developing relationships with others. Staffs are able to provide opportunities through their intentional actions to foster a community that supports reaching these needs, but cannot force a person to take advantage of any opportunity.

Consider a student attending a mid-sized state university who knows few students at the institution chosen. The student lives on campus and has the opportunity to be introduced to campus not only through orientation, but also through floor meetings, Resident Assistants, and

fellow members living on the same floor or in the same building. The mere presence of the student on campus increases knowledge due to an employee such as a Resident Assistant being able to share information or introduction to upper-classmen who are more familiar with campus. The same student commuting will not be afforded the same opportunities, which limits the amount of opportunities for connecting to campus.

Summary

The work of Chickering and Reisser (1993) gives a solid base to understanding how students develop and the different vectors students can be in as they come to college. Understanding where they are in their development process is important to understanding their needs as well. To understand the idea of needs, the work of Abraham Maslow (1943) was reviewed, specifically “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.” The process of impression formation was then reviewed to understand how the process takes place and why it is important to consider when looking at perceptions of colleges and universities. Additional literature regarding the newly named millennial generation was discussed to give some characteristics found in the traditionally aged students attending college now. Finally, the role of residence halls and their purpose on college and university campuses was established by looking at the websites and messages from different universities. Each university promotes a different message for the purpose of their residence life programs, but within each message is the idea that residence halls do have a purpose more than a place to sleep, eat, and so on. The next chapter will cover the methodology used in gathering data, the data collection process, the participants involved, and the instrument utilized for data collection.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In order to understand how student perceptions are formed and what the current perceptions of campus are, this study relied on direct interviews with students at a midsize, Midwestern Public University. In this chapter, the selection of participants, types of interviews, location of interviews, process of data collection, instruments used, process of data analysis, and the treatment of the data will all be reviewed. Jonathan Moreno (1999) commented on the importance of research design writing, “although discussions of ethical issues in research involving human subjects most usually provoke concerns about valid informed consent procedures, arguably the way a study is designed is a more consequential concern” (p. 175).

Participants

The sample consisted of nine individuals randomly selected during their orientation visit day at a Midwestern Public University. Each participant selected was attending an orientation day for first year, first-time students planning to live in University Housing. A large majority of students did not arrive to their orientation day until fifteen to twenty minutes prior to the start. Due to this, the nine participants were picked based on availability and the time they arrived to allow adequate interviewing time before orientation began. In addition, participants were selected to represent a variety of races, ethnicities, and sexes.

Rachel is an African American female from a large urban area. She attended a small charter school near a major metropolitan city. She shared a room and bathroom while growing up and had her roommate randomly selected. The participant showed a great deal of excitement about being at the institution, which showed during her interview and responses.

Phillip is a Caucasian male from a small rural area and attended a small high school. While growing up, he shared a room and bathroom. He had his roommate randomly selected.

Carrie is an African American female from a major metropolitan area and attended a large school in the urban area. She was a non-traditional student who had two children and was moving into University Apartments to accommodate her family. Due to this fact she did not meet the qualifications of this study it was determined that she was not a relevant participant to the overall study on residence hall perceptions, and thus has been removed from the remainder of this study.

Marcus is a Caucasian male from the a large metropolitan suburb and attended a large school in the suburban area. He shared a room and bathroom while growing up and had a roommate randomly selected.

Rebecca is a Caucasian female from the a large suburb and attended a small school in the area. She shared a room and bathroom while growing up and had a roommate randomly selected.

Ralph is a Caucasian male from a large suburban area and attended a large school in the area. He did not share a room, but did share a bathroom while growing up and chose his roommate who was a friend from high school.

Russell is an African American male from a major metropolitan suburb and attended a private preparatory school in the urban area. He shared a room and bathroom while growing up and had a roommate randomly selected.

Jordan is an African American male from a metropolitan community and attended a large school in the urban area. He shared a room and bathroom while growing up and had a roommate randomly selected.

Lucy is a Caucasian female from the large suburban community and attended a large school in the area. She shared a room and bathroom while growing up and had a roommate randomly selected.

A sample of nine participants was pulled randomly from a targeted group of students enrolled at the Midwestern Public University selected for this study. Past studies which found that theme saturation can be achieved after twelve total interviews, and this being a thesis which plans to conduct multiple interviews with each participant the number ten has been selected as an appropriate number for gaining insight in to this topic (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Participants selected were entering as first year, first time students living on campus. This population was targeted because this study hopes to gain further insight in to students pre and post perceptions of the residential experience. Utilizing a targeted population in research is important because it counters the small sample size in an attempt to make results more generalizable (Vogt, 2004).

The students were initially selected based on the availability and access given to the researcher to interview the students. Each student had the same probability of being selected to participate in the study without regard to demographic factors. Students participated by choice and had the option to withdraw from the study at any point in the process. Given this option to participate after the initial interview, five students did not respond to the researcher's request to set up a second interview, and the remaining four responded the researcher's request to set up a third interview. Students who selected to participate were asked to complete a consent form (Appendix B) at the beginning of the study. Participants were reminded of the consent form and the options for withdrawal from the study throughout the study. In the end four students participated in all three interviews and these participants included Marcus, Ralph, Russell and

Lucy. In transcribing the interviews participants are identified by a pseudonym and the researcher is the only individual who knows the identity of participants.

Location

The site for this study was a mid-sized (11,630 students) public university located in the rural Midwest. The population of the city is approximately 21,000 including the student population attending the university. The actual site for the interviews was in a room located in a student union on the campus of the university and a study room in a residential housing building.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred through the use of interviews. Freshmen students who have chosen to live in the residence halls were interviewed in their first semester. Qualitative inquiry followed a pattern of three separate interviews separated by approximately three weeks. Each interview consisted of a specific topic focused to follow the phenomenological model (Seidman, 2006). The phenomenological method helps the researcher understand a phenomenon, in this study it is student perception of the residence halls before and after arriving on campus once they have lived in the community (Seidman, 2006). The first interview (Appendix C) focused on the life history of the participant to establish rapport, understanding the background of each individual, and establishing rapport between the researcher and participant. This includes gaining insight into the students' background experiences in addition to their initial impressions of college life, living in the residence halls, and the institution. A student who has come from a home with a single room, home cooked meals each night, and a bathroom to themselves may have a very different experience within the residence halls than a similar aged student who shared a room, bathroom, and was responsible for making meals each night. The previous life story will help to pull out themes, similarities, and differences between the students as the second

and third interviews begin. College experience is promoted in many ways, through media, friends and family, and understanding what is shaping a student's initial perceptions and expectations is necessary to understanding how they experience college later. The interview took place during summer orientation prior to the student residing in the residence hall.

The second interview (Appendix C) focused on the details of the student experience and perceptions within the residence hall. During the second interview emphasis was placed on particular interactions the student had with the community and the facilities in the residence halls. The second interview was important because it allowed each student to express how they were interacting with the community around them. One student may utilize a computer lab, front desk amenities, or the resident assistants of the hall while another may not interact with any of these provisions. The student may have taken leadership roles or have developed a close relationship with their roommate or others on the floor and within the residence hall. The difference in interactions can help to explain the overall experience of a student within the residence hall. In this section, the opinion of the student on the effectiveness or condition of the hall is not asked for through the questions, instead focusing on the concrete actions taken by each student. The second interview took place three weeks after the student moved in to the residence hall.

The final interview (Appendix C) focused on a reflection of the meaning of the first two interviews. The intention in the final interview was for the student to reflect on the experiences from their past living situations and their expectations for the experience they had of living on campus. In this interview, the intention was to see how past living experiences and current living experiences have shaped meaning in the lives of the students. Seidman (2006) defines the section by saying, "The question of meaning is not one of satisfaction or reward, although such issues

may play a part in the participants' thinking. Rather, it addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (p. 18). Seidman (2006) conducted a much different study, yet the ideas of creating connection and meaning connect to students living in the residence halls. As stated previously, satisfaction is an expected outcome when asking the student to reflect on their connection to the residence hall. While Seidman (2006) stated that these ideas do not define "meaning," the level of satisfaction remains an important outcome from the interviews. This interview took place halfway through the first semester of living in the residence halls and in addition to looking at student satisfaction; it also allowed the researcher to gain insight in to the student experience within the residence halls.

Instruments

A needs assessment called the discrepancy model was utilized in the study. The discrepancy model consists of three separate phases which are goal setting, performance measurement, and discrepancy identification (McKillip, 1987). The goal setting phase identifies what ought to be, in this case the perceived needs the students have of living in the residence halls. The goals were evaluated using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

After the goals were set, the second step is performance measurement. Performance measurement is done to take the step of "determining what is" (McKillip, 1987 p.21). Typically in performance measurement, a survey is utilized (McKillip, 1987). In this case interviews were used to gather detailed descriptions of what the current experience is for the participants. The interviews (Appendix C) contained questions based around the five major categories in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The categories include physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943).

The third interview, which occurred approximately six weeks into the academic year, or mid-semester, required the participant to look at their expectations and experiences. This interview was designed to measure discrepancy identification, that is, to understand the students' perspective on how their experience is, or is not living up to their expectations. This was the most critical piece in that it allows the researcher to understand student satisfaction as it relates to their preconceived expectations and actual experiences (McKillip, 1987). All of this helped in understanding why students choose to remain in the residence halls and the institution.

Limitations of Data Collection

The study was limited to only one campus and ultimately caused difficulty in generalizing the results without information being gathered at other campuses. The size, location, and structure of the institution selected causes difficulty in the study being recreated at larger institutions or institutions with a different makeup. The study was based on the effectiveness of the researcher in the interviews and the honesty of answers given by interviewees. In addition, the researcher brings bias into the equation in determining themes pulled out from transcripts and was reflected in the coding performed by the researcher.

To account for some of these limitations, the researcher performed interviews using the questions on peers to see the effectiveness of the line of questioning and the overall effectiveness at reaching the research questions of the study. Alterations that are necessary based on the ineffectiveness of questions were made prior to the questions being utilized with actual participants in the study. The researcher utilized two other people to assist in the coding process of transcripts. Additional readers to help in the coding ensures the elimination of some researcher bias and allows the researcher to reflect on what others see when reading the transcripts (Berends & Johnston, 2005). Participants were also asked to review their transcripts, and after the first two

were asked about their perceptions of what they said in the prior interview as it relates to the new set of questioning.

Treatment of Data

The treatment of data took place according to the Describe-Compare-Relate model created by Pat Bazeley (2009). The model focuses on the steps taken to identify themes within qualitative research, focusing on how to use the steps to identify themes or categories within the research. The first step, describe, focuses on “the context for the study and provides details about source of data, such as the demographic feature of the sample and the interrelationships between these features” (Bazeley, 2009, p. 9). These give necessary background against which further analyses will be read, as well as providing a basis for comparative analysis, then move to the first major category or theme and describe and record its characteristics and boundaries (Bazeley, 2009). The second step, compare, looks at “differences in the characteristics and boundaries for just that category or theme across contrasting demographic groups or across variations in context” (Bazeley, 2009, p. 10). Relate is the final step and takes the theme or categories found and relates them to themes and categories written about in prior literature around the same subject (Bazeley, 2009). The steps found in the model will be repeated to identify each theme and category within the interviews completed by the researcher.

Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs played a major role in assisting the Describe-Compare-Relate model. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs established the categories and themes for the initial describe portion, as it contains the lens being used to research students living in the residence halls. The next step of comparison utilized a single category found in the hierarchy and showed how each individual relates to each other based on the category. For example, an interview with a first-year male may yield very different results from an interview with a first-

year female. Examining consistencies or inconsistencies across categories was an important part of the coding process to obtain rich data. The final step was to take the results of the study to describe and compare steps to identify how the results relate to past literature. Continuing to use these results to build on past literature and examine the themes found was an essential part of strengthening the integrity of the research. All reviewers will follow the same protocol to ensure validity and reliability based on the consistency across the board in the coding process.

Summary

In this chapter, several topics have been addressed including the amount of participants, types of interviews, location of interviews, process of data collection, instruments used, process of data analysis, and the treatment of the data will all be reviewed to give a clear picture of how the study will take place to allow for future studies to replicate and alter steps of the research.

In the next chapter the results gathered from the participants in the study will be laid out according to Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. Each interview will be separated, focusing on the different levels and how the participant responses relate to those levels.

Chapter IV

Findings

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the findings from the participants in each of the three interviews that spanned from the orientation days to the middle of the first semester. As discussed earlier, each participants' interview was reviewed using Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. The levels were put into a pyramid format to show how one level built upon another to reach the highest level of needs being met. The first level, physiological, focused on what is necessary for a human being to survive such as food, drink, and shelter. After these needs are met, the hierarchy moves into safety, which delves into the idea of keeping the individual, belongings, morality, and family safe. After safety, Maslow discussed the idea of love and belonging, focusing on ideas of friendship, family, and sexual intimacy as key needs that must be met. Following the love and belonging level is esteem. Esteem takes a look at the self-esteem of the individual person and the respect that is given out by that individual to the people with whom they interact. The final stage discussed by Maslow is known as self-actualization and it focuses on each individual working to reach their full potential.

This hierarchy was utilized to understand how the responses of the individuals gave insight into how first year students perceived their needs would be met by the residence halls and campus and in the later interviews how their needs were being met through life in the residence halls. The first research question, "what is student perception of residence hall life before entering the institution," coincided with the first interview which took place during each student's orientation day. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs provides a clear outline of what needs the student believed would be met by the residence halls and campus as a whole. The

second research question, “how do residence hall perceptions differ from pre-enrollment to mid-semester” focused on how perceptions brought in the first interview changed throughout the semester into the second and third interviews. The final research question, “how does the residence hall experience meet the needs (expectations) of the students” looked at the original expectations of the student in the first interview and how those were met over the course of the second and third interviews.

In this chapter each interview will be reviewed by the categories of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Each level will be discussed in regards to the emerging themes that came from participant responses. Participant responses will be cited to reinforce the themes.

The Interviews

Interview #1

During the first interview participants were asked a series of questions focusing on their knowledge of residence hall life, as well as basic demographic questions regarding their past living arrangements. These questions on living arrangements provided insight in to whether students shared a bathroom or bedroom prior to coming to college, the type of city or town they grew up in, and the racial/ethnic diversity of their home community. The two themes most discussed by participants included physiological and love/belonging. The levels of the hierarchy are placed according to the level of importance based on Maslow’s (1943) original theory.

Physiological. When the participants were asked about what they anticipated living in the residence halls would be like they most often talked about the amount of living space and the sharing of a bathroom. The amount of living space was the most discussed aspect of living within the residence halls with varying perspectives of what it means to live in these spaces. Four participants commented that the size of the room was enough for two individuals to live in

and they would have no trouble living in such space. Five participants cited the room size as a great concern they had about living on campus. Marcus stated during his interview that, “It wasn’t super small. I thought it would be a lot more like a two-by-two cubicle. It was like, bigger than I thought it would be, from what you hear, like this little cramped room. It is definitely livable.” Ralph stated that, “I’d say the only thing I’ve heard about the dorm, dorm life is cramped.”

Sharing a bathroom with several people was another item participants identified as something they were thinking about in regard to living on campus. Several participants expressed some concern, but had no doubt that they could adjust to community style bathrooms. This idea is captured by Marcus who said, “I’m not a private person when it comes to bathrooms, or sharing, it is not that big of a deal, but it is always nice to have. I know it is going to be a big switch and you know horror stories about how that works, but I’m not that worried about it.” Lucy brought a different perspective to this stating, “I am not looking forward to those full showers. I’m like oh my God. I take like two hour showers so, it is going to suck.”

Safety. Safety around campus did not appear to be a big concern to participants during the first interview. Phillip, in responding to a question about safety on campus, shows evidence of this point stating that, “[I’m] not really too concerned about safety, because I can pretty much hold my own against anyone. From what I saw on the tour, the campus is pretty safe, with the security phones and everything everywhere.” Rebecca further supported this sentiment saying that, “I think it is pretty good. They still have those little stands that have the emergency buttons.” Ralph noted that, “Going here I noticed, I saw like four cop cars. Not really worried about that. There is a hospital, ten or fifteen minutes down the road.”

The lone sentiment of concern was expressed by Lucy who stated that, “Okay the woman’s resource center, that scared me because my grandma was like ‘you know why you have that right?’ She said all the girls that get roofied and stuff, and I was like ‘oh great there’s something to look forward to.’ That scared me. It is a big enough problem that they need a woman’s resource center, it must be pretty bad.” Lucy’s quote demonstrates the influence family and friends can have on the overall perception of an institution.

Love and Belonging. Love and belonging encompassed the largest amount of responses and was found to be the topic that each participant talked about the most in thinking about moving to campus. The topics varied from extended relationship with family, to roommate relationships, and the amount of on-campus social activity.

Students discussed their relationships with their parents and the biggest differences that would appear while being on campus. Phillip discussed the negatives of home life saying that, “Definitely getting away from the dram[a] of my home life. That’s the big thing.” The positives of home life were discussed by Lucy, who focused on the attachment to her parents saying, “Definitely going to miss my parents a lot and I know I’m going to miss my cats because they are like family.”

The next theme that arose was the forming of a relationship with a roommate. Excitement was common in meeting someone new who they would live with for the year. Rachel stated, “I am excited to meet her and see how she is. I don’t know. I guess as long as I end up with someone that I can kind of relate to or like get along well with, I think it will be alright.” Phillip gave a similar response saying, “I’m pretty excited about meeting someone new. You know, seeing how other people would react to a situation like that. I mean not too excited. I don’t really know what my roommate is going to be like.” Ralph was the lone participant who

already knew his roommate. He chose his best friend to be his roommate. Ralph discussed having his close friend as a roommate saying, “Yeah it is nice going in knowing somebody, at least having that kind of ground, that home ground that you know in your room. I think it is also nice you don’t have to worry. I mean what if someone is like maybe not such a great person?”

The amount of on-campus social activity, particularly in the residence halls, was a topic addressed by the participants. When discussing the residence halls in particular, Marcus said, “I heard it is a really social atmosphere, seems like I will get close to everyone on my floor.” Ralph talked about the prospect of meeting new people while living in the halls,

Well I guess it is just the opportunity to live with a bunch of people, you are about to find people who are really similar to yourself. I’d say meeting new people and making friends. In the same aspect, meeting new people...I’m a little nervous about meeting people and you know I’ve never been in a situation where I had to live with a bunch of people.

Esteem. Each participant discussed the excitement about being able to live on their own away from the total influences of parental figures with a level of confidence exhibiting esteem. Marcus discussed this idea saying, “I’m ready to leave my house...I’m just ready to go, leave the coop and it’s still far enough away where my parents won’t be up here every weekend. I am just excited to be on my own.” He continued by discussing the amount of independence campus gives an individual saying, “I think just the freedom you have here. They just kind of let you go, have fun and good luck.” Ralph similarly discussed these ideas by saying, “I kind of want to be on my own, kind of avoid the whole parents thing. It’s generic student stuff. You want to get away from parents.”

Self-Actualization. Few responses fell into the category of self-actualization. For this reason, there were no significant emerging themes from this section. The only responses in this section were from Carrie who was an older student, living in university owned apartments with her children. Due to her living circumstances, she was not able to be included in the findings of the study or counted as a participant who could be followed up with for the rest of the study.

Interview #2

During the second round of interviews four participants did not respond to requests to continue in the study and one was removed because she was not living in the traditional residence halls, thus not be applicable to the research. The second round of interviews took place with the remaining four participants, focusing on their experiences since coming to campus. The interview took place early in the semester, and required participants to compare what they had expected from living on campus to what they were now experiencing. Areas such as campus involvement, comparisons to home life, and the amount of overall interactions were all topics addressed during this interview. The second interview had similar themes from Maslow's (1943) hierarchy emerge, with love/belonging having the greatest emphasis, followed by physiological.

Physiological. After spending a few weeks on campus, the four participants remaining in the study gave answers similar to each other when asked about their current living situations. Three of the four discussed the space of the room. Ralph commented saying, "Everybody tells you about the college life, you know, living in a small spot. The truth is that the rooms aren't that small at all. I was expecting a lot worse." Russell gave a different perspective, explaining that, "I had to get used to being in something smaller than what my room is like and sharing it

with somebody.” Marcus furthered this point stating, “Definitely have smaller quarters because I used to live in the basement at my old house.”

A few concerns about the condition of the room were expressed by two of the participants. Marcus explained that, “I need to put some work orders in. My room is kind of busted.” Russell talked about the temperature stating, “It is just always cold even when we turn it down. That is one of the biggest things for me it’s always cold and I’ve been sick twice because of it.” While these issues were recognized by the two participants, each of the four participants stated overall satisfaction with the residence hall where they were living. Ralph said, “It’s way better than what I thought it was going to be.”

Safety. During the second interview, three of the four participants discussed campus safety in a positive manner. The fourth participant did not directly address safety. Ralph said, “I am not really worried about any of my stuff getting damaged. I could leave the door open and just go to the bathroom without worrying about my stuff.” Marcus talked further about safety and security, “I think there are like three or four locked doors between me and the outside world. I know this is bad, but I usually sleep with my door unlocked and I am totally comfortable.” Both Ralph and Marcus did not express much concern over safety during their first interview.

Lucy was the only participant during the first interview who had expressed concern over campus safety, discussing the influence of her family on her perception of the campus. Lucy saw a change in that perception after being exposed to campus stating, “I thought campus was going to be really scary and confusing and dangerous. I walk around at night and no one is ever out. It is not scary at all.” She also shared that, “At the first hall meeting a woman dropped off rape whistles and everybody in the building got one. I was concerned like ‘Oh my God why?’ A few days later I thought it was a joke, it seemed unnecessary.”

Love and Belonging. As earlier stated, love and belonging represented the level of the hierarchy most discussed by the participants. The overarching theme was meeting people and creating friendships during their first weeks on campus. Each person discussed a different way of meeting people based on their involvement within residence life and campus. Marcus talked about Greek Life and Orientation saying, “The first week I met a lot of kids during orientation so I have a close knit group. I know me, my roommate, and a couple of other guys rushed a fraternity.” Ralph talked about his experience with his roommate stating, “Well I kind of knew a few people before, and I am rooming with my best friend. We go out a lot and get to know our classmates.”

Each focused on knowing a lot of people within their hall. Ralph said that, “Actually I’d have to say that most of them are actually in my hall. My friend is in our hall and our other friends are just on different floors in our hall.” Russell had a similar experience with Orientation stating, “I met a lot of them through the events the first weekend. I met some in class and stuff like that.” Russell had a wider range of friends though saying, “None of them live in my hall. They all live in other halls.” Lucy had an experience more consistent with Ralph and Marcus, having several friends within her hall. She lives in a smaller community and said, “I love having only two floors. It is like a small little knit community and everybody does everything together. They all went to the football game together.”

The difference in perception of fit also was an emerging theme that was discussed by two of the participants. Marcus stated that:

I didn’t think I would have this many friends. I go to the dining hall and I’ve never sat alone. I’ve met enough people, which I never thought I would. I was planning on eating at home at least once a week.

Ralph talked about how his initial orientation experience left a bad impression, but expressed that his residence hall experience changed that impression saying:

I feel like orientation in a sense is a little misleading because you are put into a really small group of people and I just felt so out of it with the group for some reason. They all had their own thing going on, they seemed to know each other and I didn't know any of them. It just threw me off that I was that one guy that wasn't really fitting in; I didn't know how it was going to be. The day I moved in, it was completely changed. I'm not saying orientation is bad by any means, it was just outcasting. As soon as I moved in everything was great and I realized this was awesome. I love it here.

Esteem. During the course of the interviews, two participants discussed matters of esteem. Each participant had one comment relating to the topic of esteem. Marcus discussed the feeling of being on his own saying:

I didn't think it would be this comfortable. I really didn't you know? Just walking around during orientation, I just didn't think it would be this homey. I would have never imagined in a million years that I wouldn't want to go back home, which I don't ever want to go back home. I am dreading Christmas break.

Ralph furthered the sentiment by discussing the freedom he felt since coming to college saying:

It is just an awesome feeling knowing I can kind of be on my own, make my own decisions and I'm already doing, grade-wise, better than I did in high school. It's just nice knowing you've got that. To actually live on your own. They're [resident assistants] not stomping down on the rules part. I mean there are rules, but they are not really unnecessary rules. I like it here."

Self-Actualization. During the interviews, two participants discussed topics relating to self-actualization. Marcus said, “I like how I wake up at eight to go to class, then I’m done by nine and have two and a half hours to kind of plan my own schedule and do what I want.” Ralph continued the point saying:

I guess it is more of the freedom aspect. I don’t really have to ask to do anything and I don’t really have a lot of responsibilities at home [residence hall]. The only responsibility I have is my school work because that is what is keeping me here and if I don’t do well in that I won’t be able to stay. I can do what I want, set my own schedules. I think I’m actually better off that way. I used to never do my laundry at home, but now I do it every week and then I clean my room. That never happened at home. It made me grow up.

Interview #3

The third and final interview focused on the experiences of the participants at the middle of the first semester, or at least six weeks in to the fall semester. The interviews followed the same four participants who participated in the second interview. The third interview focused on the perceptions of the participants’ experiences thus far in to the academic year. The questions asked helped in understanding how campus involvement had increased or decreased the change in relationships and how students had utilized campus resources over the course of the semester. In addition, participants were asked to review the transcripts from the previous two interviews and share their reaction to reading these in comparison with how they describe their current experiences and perceptions.

The interview questions utilized focused on campus involvement and overall campus satisfaction to that point. The two most prevalent themes were major changes in social groups

and suggestions for improving campus safety/security. The participants were also asked to reflect on the past two transcriptions and talk about what had changed over the course of the interview process.

Physiological. The final interview represented a drop-off in responses regarding Maslow's (1943) physiological level. No responses were given relating to any physiological needs. However, the final interview focused less on direct questions about the physiological conditions of campus. The focus was instead on overall satisfaction, which prompted no responses regarding the physiological conditions of campus.

Safety. During the interview, participants were asked about ways of improving safety on campus as a whole. Three participants had specific suggestions about campus and specific suggestions on how to improve on campus safety. Marcus stated that:

They need more lights. It is dark everywhere. When I walk home in the wee hours of the morning, it is really dark. They have lights everywhere, but they are dim and don't really work. You need big bright lights. It should stay daylight in the night.

Russell discussed some of the current events on campus when talking about security saying:

Probably have more security around. I mean you see campus security, but not all the time and then with the robberies going on and stuff like that, it pretty much happens right by our hall or by Greek Court or close to campus. I think they should have more people over there and I travel there at night. Nothing has ever happened to me, lucky; but I think that if it's happening in that one particular spot all the time because I don't really hear about it happening anywhere else they should have more campus security in that area and just on campus in general.

Lucy also related her suggestions on safety to an event she heard about on campus saying:

I don't think there is much except monitoring the frat parties a little more because I've heard things and I was a little scared to go outside one night. I heard a fraternity was making their pledges go around punching women in the face. They would tap them on the shoulder and when they turned around they would punch them in the face. I am a little nervous to go outside now, but it didn't happen to me so I am okay. I mean, really those parties are the only thing. I am a little scared of those.

Love and Belonging. The area of love and belonging continued to be discussed the most by each participant. The theme shifted from developing relationships to the changing relationship dynamics as the semester continued. Russell explained:

It's most of the people I was friends with when, in my last interview. I am pretty much friends with them, except there was one incident with one person who I don't get with anymore, because I feel like if we are in college I shouldn't have to have a problem with you or not. Or at least even if we do have a problem, not a problem where we can't just talk about it. If it is just going to be like high school over again then I would rather not deal with you at all. So I just kind of let that person go and I've met a lot of new people, who I am getting close with now. So, it is pretty much, stayed the same. I've added a couple of people, a couple of people in my life and pretty much only one that I'm just not friends with anymore.

Marcus identified a shift in his social group saying:

My social group has completely switched. The people I hang out with or did hang out with I don't talk to as much and the people who I didn't talk to as much are my really good friends. My two best friends were in the hall and I don't talk to them anymore.

Esteem. During the interview participants were asked about their current campus involvement and to reflect on their experiences while on campus. Three out of the four participants discussed how involvement in leadership positions had helped them prepare for the future. Lucy discussed this saying, "I went to a leadership conference and attended a bunch of programs there. It taught me a lot about public speaking and stuff like that, which can be important as a teacher." Marcus continued on the topic of involvement saying, "I am looking to get more involved in business groups and some more activities within the hall. I am going to run for a position or something like that. I am just trying to get more involved than I already am."

A point brought up by Marcus was the idea of respect for others and respect by others. He discussed an issue in his community saying,

One thing that bugs me about our floor is trouble makers. If someone puts up a poster or anything, someone will rip it down. It bugs me because our floor is bare and others are decorated and cool. It is the one thing, everything is the same except for that which has gotten worse."

Self-Actualization. The final interview contained the most responses to the area of self-actualization. The central theme discussed by each participant was the problem solving that went into coming onto a college campus and the independence of being on their own. Each participant was faced with different challenges throughout their time on campus. Ralph compared his high school achievement to college saying:

In high school I really didn't do much, I didn't read anything; I didn't do the homework until a few minutes before class. I think that now that I have to do it on my own, I don't know if I am proving it to myself or what, but I am getting my homework done, doing laundry. I think coming here is the best decision I've made.

Lucy found several challenges that could be helped through the use of on-campus resources. She explained saying:

Health Services was great, the doctor was the nicest doctor I've met in my life. He totally helped me when I was sick and made me go to the emergency room. Even the Admissions Office, that place is lovely. They helped me with everything, even when I was like I don't know what to do.

Russell also talked about the usefulness of resources saying:

Before I went to the Writing Center, I think my first paper I got a 'C' on. I thought I was a good writer because I got good grades in high school, so I didn't think I would need them. My English teacher from high school kept encouraging me to go, but I didn't listen at first. I said 'I know what I'm doing' and I turned in that paper. It opened my eyes that I actually needed to go and when I actually went it helped a lot.

Russell's experience shows the ability to adapt to beliefs held based on past experiences and learning how to navigate new, challenging situations. In addition, Russell showed a move towards independence as he wanted to make a decision for himself, opposed to listening to the initial guidance of a high school teacher. The theme of independence moves throughout each quote from the participants. Marcus highlighted the idea of independence saying, "I just like the independent thing. Especially now that, a couple of my classes end early since that is how they

are scheduled. I have a lot more free time now. I like that aspect of becoming more independent.”

Summary

In the chapter, data collected from each of the three interviews was analyzed using Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. Seeing how participant responses related to the different levels of the hierarchy helps to show which needs are being met by the residence halls and which areas are not being addressed in the halls. The levels of physiological as well as love/support were the most discussed by participants. The levels of esteem and self-actualization were found in some responses, but not nearly in the same frequency as the lower levels of the hierarchy.

In the next chapter the research questions proposed at the beginning of the study will be analyzed and how participant responses serve to answer some of those questions. Looking into how the preconceptions of campus line up with the actual experiences students had once arriving on campus will be the primary focus of the responses in the next chapter.

Chapter V

Research Questions

Introduction

The study was conducted to see how first-year college students' perceptions of residence halls changes from pre-enrollment through the first semester. The purpose was to see how student pre-perceptions of residence life align with what students experience while on-campus. The chapter will focus on how the participant responses related to each of the research questions. The first research question, "what is student perception of residence hall life before entering the institution," sought to understand what students knew about residence hall living prior to arriving on campus. The first interview with participants helped to understand the students' perceptions. The second research question, "how do residence hall perceptions differ from pre-enrollment to mid-semester" focused on how perceptions of participants may have changed from before living on campus to after and what factors impacted those perceptions. The final research question, "how does the residence hall experience meet the needs (expectations) of the students" looked at the original expectations of the student and how those expectations were met or changed over the course of their first semester.

RQ #1- What is student perception of residence hall life before entering the institution?

During the first interview, participants were asked about what they knew regarding residence life and things they had heard about living on campus. While the responses varied, several common themes were identified which included room size, social environment, and an absence of knowledge with an emphasis on where the person will be living and whom they will be living with in the residence hall.

Room size. When asked about what they had heard about living on campus, several participants referred to the size of rooms. In his response, Ralph said, “I’d say the only thing I’ve heard about dorm life is that it is cramped. Other than that I have nothing to go on.” Russell shared a different perception stating, “I mean the dorm rooms are a pretty nice size and that’s basically it.” Marcus, after seeing an actual room during a campus tour, said, “It wasn’t super small. I thought it would be a lot more like a two-by-two cubicle. It was bigger than I thought it would be. From what you hear, it is supposed to be a cramped little room.”

Social environment. In addition to the theme of room space, the social environment in the residence halls was something all of the participants had a perception of in relation to living on campus. Marcus talked about the atmosphere saying, “I heard it is a really social atmosphere, seems like I will get close to everyone on my floor.” Ralph talked about an adjustment period stating, “Twenty people that like live here. I am not opposed to it, but it will take a little getting used to.” Russell put a similar sentiment in few words saying, “Just seeing a lot more people.” The consistent theme of living with a group of people on a floor was one aspect that these individuals were thinking about prior to moving into the halls.

Absence of Knowledge. Students interviewed also stated that they knew very little about what it was like to live on campus. When asked about her previous knowledge or perception of the residence halls Rachel talked about not knowing anything or having any pre-conceived notions about the experience, but was looking forward to living on campus. While others provided some detail, many showed a lack of knowledge or perceptions about residence hall life. After initially not having a response, Rebecca said, “Um, I’m going to have a roommate and now space. That’s about all I know.”

RQ #2- How do residence hall perceptions differ from pre-enrollment to mid-semester?

During the second and third interviews, participants were asked to review their responses from the past interview and discuss how those expectations matched up with their experience with the residence halls. Each individual provided a different perspective when discussing their perception prior to living on campus compared to their current living experience. The students overwhelmingly responded with surprise at a better living environment than was initially expected.

In her first interview, Lucy expressed much concern about campus safety. She discussed concern over her grandmother telling her that the only reason campuses had Women's Resource Centers was because sexual assault was commonplace on campuses. The family influence on Lucy helped to shape her perception of campus being unsafe prior to her experience living on campus. During the second and third interviews, Lucy expressed a shift in her thoughts on campus safety. She expressed comfort in walking around campus by herself during the day and night. In addition she recalled during the first hall meeting being given a rape whistle, furthering her initial concern about campus safety. She expressed that after a few days on campus the whistle seemed unnecessary and she considered the meeting a joke considering the level of campus safety that existed in her view.

In his first interview Russell discussed a high school excursion to the college that had allowed him to stay on campus and get the feel for what the university was offering. During his second and third interviews he said that the excursion had not given him the full picture of what it meant to be living at the college. He had expectations based on what family members and high school teachers had told him prior to attending, but felt the experience truly changed once he began living on campus. In particular, adapting to a new living environment was a challenge for

Russell with his roommate and the residence hall in general. He often spent time outside of the hall because he did not feel connected to the community within the hall.

Russell discussed the rigor of college classes in comparison to high school classes. He believed that his past academic success would guarantee the same success in college, but found out through an early assignment this was not the case. He began to utilize resources around campus to assist in assignments. The unanticipated difficulty of college gave Russell some challenges, but he felt that he was able to navigate them well and continued to talk about his overall enjoyment of college.

During his first interview Ralph expressed an adjustment period that would need to take place regarding living around several people all the time. In his second and third interview, Ralph did not bring this topic up much, instead focusing on his orientation experience as the foundation of his perceptions of what the college experience would provide to him. During orientation, Ralph felt like he did not fit in with the group he was put with and he became concerned that the entire college experience would mirror this experience. He felt that this perception was completely changed following move-in day. Ralph talked about having a great experience and realizing he did fit in at the institution. He talked about getting connected with the people living on his floor and in his building as being a big part of what helped him change the perception of being an outcast developed at orientation. Ralph shifted from being concerned about the living environment to talking about the community built as being one of the strengths that helped him become acclimated to campus.

During his first interview Marcus had talked about the social environment of the college campus and had pre-conceived notions of an active social life ahead. He continued to talk about this theme into his second and third interview. While he expected a social environment, Marcus

was surprised at the amount of friendships he was able to build in a quick amount of time. He talked about his overall comfort level and feeling at home in a new place. The new home feel was important to him because after returning to his parents' home for a weekend visit, he noticed that he felt that his college living space was the place he wanted to be more so than his parent's home. Marcus did not expect this to ever happen when he left for college and even after his time spent at the university during orientation.

RQ #3- How does the residence hall experience meet the needs (expectations) of the students?

During the final interview, participants were asked to review their responses from the past interviews and focus on how their expectations were being met by residence life. Each individual provided a different perspective when discussing the needs (expectations) that were met by living in residence life.

Lucy had overcome concerns about safety from the beginning and found campus to be a place she enjoyed overall. The needs of love and belonging (Maslow, 1943) were met through the close-knit environment established in her residence hall and the development of a relationship with a boyfriend that Lucy often talked about being a big part of her life at the university. The efforts of hall staff to put on programs were also reasons why Lucy was satisfied with the living environment in the halls. One area that Lucy was frustrated with was the use of cannabis by floor mates and the perception that nothing was being done to stop this action. This behavior has the possibility of interrupting the academic environment expected within a residence hall. Adding to the level of discomfort for some time was a roommate with whom Lucy did not develop a positive relationship. The problem was solved through a room change that Lucy said improved her living experience.

Russell talked about being satisfied overall with the residence hall experience. He talked about having the opportunity to create new relationships and the academic support provided by campus as reasons for his success on campus. Russell had difficulty meeting people in his own residence hall and the floor he lived on. The difficulties in this area were a result of his poor relationship with his roommate that deteriorated as the semester continued. Russell talked about not feeling comfortable in his own room, which encouraged him to go outside of the hall and his floor to meet other people. As the interviews continued, Russell began to spend more time in the lobby of his building and became more connected with others in the hall. Russell has found alternative solutions to connecting with others and feeling comfortable on campus, but the discomfort of living in his own room challenges his academic success and developing an environment suitable for academic tasks.

Ralph found that his needs were being met by the residence hall, life overall no complaints about what had happened. Ralph had chosen to live with his best friend from his hometown and it had worked out well for him in regards to his living situation. He talked about it limiting him at the beginning because he didn't feel inclined to reach out to meet people since he knew his roommate so well. As the semester continued on, Ralph began to meet more people and develop new relationships and spend more time outside of his living space.

Ralph discussed his academic success when compared to that with high school. He talked about being on his own as a motivator to succeed and organize his life in a more efficient manner than he had previously. He talked about how the living space promoted academic activity and that his comfort level within the hall was very high. Adding to this comfort was a bevy of programs put on by hall staff. Ralph ultimately believed that there was nothing that he would change about the experience he had over the semester.

Marcus' satisfaction continued to be linked mainly to the social interactions he had since arriving to campus. He found the room and food services to be adequate, but neither seemed to be a major concern to him. As with several participants, the level of love and belonging created the most detailed answers (Maslow, 1943). Marcus during his first two interviews talked about the large amount of social interaction that occurred, particularly the abundance of relationships he had created over a short span of time. In his last interview, Marcus talked much more about how campus was segregated between Greek students and non-Greek students. He discussed this in his own community and found the process to be very similar to cliques from high school.

Marcus described the community he was living in as one that contained many "troublemakers". In particular, he voiced his frustrations over the resident assistant of the community spending time putting up decorations and signs for them to be torn down. Marcus compared his own floor to that of other floors in the building, noting the lack of decorations takes away from the potential homey environment that could be created with residents being respectful to the living space.

Summary

The research questions proposed at the beginning of the study were looked at utilizing the data collected from participants. Utilizing this data provided insight into how the participants felt about the institution prior to beginning classes, midway through the semester, and their feelings towards the end of the semester. Each person brought a unique perspective and experience that allowed a view in to the life of a college-aged student first coming onto campus and the transition process that takes place in the residence halls. Participants expressed similar answers in relation to the first research question. In the next two, unique stories regarding their own experiences began to surface and helped illustrate a variety of experiences. In the next chapter

conclusions will be discussed and how these conclusion effect future studies into residence hall perceptions. In addition, limitations of the study will be listed and a final summary of the study will be provided.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The study began by outlining the importance of the satisfaction levels of first year students and how those efforts are linked with creating an involved and engaged student population (Pascarella & Terezini, 1991). As the topic was considered, looking at levels of satisfaction was important to attitude formation (Quinn, 2009). The experience in the residence halls was studied because of the commonality shared by first year freshmen staying on campus.

The purpose of the study thus looked at how the pre-enrollment attitudes regarding residence halls changed once a student actually lived in the residence hall. Looking at the pre-enrollment attitudes provided insight in to the initial expectations of students, how those expectations were formed, and the sources that influence students' initial impressions of residence life. The responses of the students were analyzed utilizing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), the work of Chickering and Reisser (1993), and three central research questions:

Research Question #1: What is student perception of residence hall life before entering the institution?

Research Question #2: How do residence hall perceptions differ from pre-enrollment to mid-semester?

Research Question #3: How does the residence hall experience meet the needs (expectations) of the students?

Discussion

In the interviews with the students it was found that initial impressions are linked to family and friend influences and interactions. Overwhelmingly the impressions were not formed by the use of college websites, advertisements, social media, or the portrayal of college life by the media, but what they learned from family and friends. This was unexpected based on prior research that discussed judgments being based solely off what is found through university websites (Noel-Levitz, 2011). Students interviewed did not mention interaction with the website, but instead focused on their positive experiences with graduates from the institution and the successful paths graduates of the institution seemed to be on. The finding added to a common theme throughout the study of participant responses being highly linked to the love and belonging level of Maslow's Hierarchy (1943).

Strange and Banning (2001) discussed the importance of physical features on a college campus and this was common in the responses of the participants. While not much depth was given in the responses, it was common to see a response about the beautiful campus, unique architecture, or even a general statement about the campus looking nice. These comments were of importance during the creation of a first impression of the campus. The importance of first impressions was outlined previously by Weygand (2002) who talked about the ways students and families are choosing colleges or universities to attend. The participants talked about their first impressions being important, especially their experiences with orientation. Some of the participants had previously come to the institution to do a campus tour, another through a program done by his high school, and one participant who had never stepped foot on campus.

As previously stated, love and belonging was important from the first interview and became increasingly more important as the students experienced campus (Maslow, 1943). At the

beginning of the semester participants were excited about the prospects of meeting many new people and developing new relationships. The importance of relationships remained a driving factor for overall satisfaction with residence hall life and campus overall. Some participants quickly found their niche on campus by joining different organizations and creating strong relationships that allowed a connection to form early. Other participants did not find their friend groups or place quite as quickly, but still discussed how the friendships they formed were an important part of their life on campus.

Love and belonging was important as it linked to several vectors outlined by Chickering and Reisser (1993). The main areas of development observed were in regards to changing social interactions, roommate issues, and the overall connection with campus. Development in the vectors of managing emotions and developing mature interpersonal relationships took place with a great number of students as they created and maintained new relationships. Some relationships survived the course of the semester, others did not. Participants talked about college being very different from high school in relationship formation and the freedom to choose friend groups on a campus where you do not see the same people each day (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Champlain College (2012) outlines five distinct stages that college freshman often experience when they attend college. The first, known as the “Honeymoon” (Champlain, 2012) talks about the initial excitement and anticipation about coming to college as well as the student living on their own. In the first interviews, participants were excited about meeting new people and especially their roommates. In the same fashion, the initial relationships formed by participants also went through this “honeymoon” stage. Participants were initially very excited and intrigued by the relationships formed, but as with any honeymoon there is an end.

This is where the second stage of “Culture Shock” comes into play (Champlain, 2013). In this stage, the realities of campus life become apparent and the individual realizes that the life is far different than living at home. If the student has come from far away, returning home is not always an option and they can begin to feel the growing pains of learning to live on their own. Some participants discussed this adjustment in regards to sharing a bathroom with many other people, living with a roommate they knew nothing about, and the new strains of college-level coursework.

As the semester continues on, students return to a period of excitement referred to as the stage of “Initial Adjustment” (Champlain, 2013). In this stage, the students are beginning to form routines and are becoming familiar with how to navigate college life. Through the interviews, many participants cited how the campus was becoming more of a home than the place they grew up. Participants talked about breaks or weekends at home being difficult because of the disconnection from their social circles and campus life in general. There was also an adjustment to living with a new roommate taking place and a general understanding of how to live with the new person. While most of the participants found this was the case, some found that this is where they began to learn the roommate they had been put with was not compatible.

The importance of roommates to the overall process of adjusting to campus can be seen by looking at the interviews with participants. The overall happiness with campus life in participants who had positive roommate experiences was higher than participants who went through roommate conflict. As discussed, in the earlier stages (i.e. “Honeymoon”) students still know very little about their roommates and the cordial, feeling out stage allows for a generally positive living environment. As the semester continues though, habits begin to develop and roommate pairs may find what they consider to be irreconcilable differences. This can be based

on beliefs, habits, personality, etc. Two participants reached this point with their respective roommates and discussed at length how the issues became too much to live in the space with the person. They expressed discontent with the roommate pairing process.

The fourth stage (Champlain, 2013) is known as “Homesickness or Loss of Confidence”. This stage as well as the fifth stage of “Acceptance and Integration” was not seen due to the time frame of this study. The two stages are described as occurring after long vacations home and attempting to reintegrate to campus life. The readjustment that takes place can inhibit their feelings about campus and the conflicting homes are difficult to resolve. After they have moved through the fourth stage, the student begins to see the college community as their permanent home.

The topic of safety yielded a great deal of discussion from participants as well. The stark contrast that could be found between negative and positive answers could be found based on the gender of the individual. Female participants were more likely to be concerned about the safety of the campus and precautions taken around creating a safe campus. Male participants were more likely to observe campus as safe or comment that safety was not a concern due to their gender or having the ability to handle any potential threats that could occur on campus.

Limitations

The study had several limitations that are important to address and consider when thinking about future research. In total, the study began with nine participants, eventually decreasing to four participants by the final interview. The low number of participants means the findings of the study are not representative, instead serving as anecdotes of a small scale of experiences. Increasing the sample size would provide more representative findings.

The generalizability of the study was also low due to the selection of participants from only one type of institution. While the information can be useful to the institution, it does not provide information that can be utilized for on-campus living at other institutions of different makeups. Seeking to conduct interviews with participants from other campuses of varying sizes as well as public/private universities will allow for comparisons regarding the residential experience.

In addition to the small sample size, the number of interviews was low. Each interview was on average twenty minutes and each participant was planned to have three interviews total. The amount of time and interviews allowed a glimpse of the experiences of each participant, but more in-depth and frequent interviews could have developed a more in-depth perspective and a better picture of the experiences of each participant.

Another limitation of the study was the low percentage of persistence. The first interview contained nine participants and the final interview contained only four participants. While one person was taken out of the study because she was not living in the residence hall, four others left the study for unknown reasons. The rate of persistence may be related to experiences the participants had on campus that discouraged them from continuing to participate in the study or the interviews themselves could have been reason for their lack of persistence. Looking into this issue more and finding avenues to increase the rate of persistence is another important topic to address to yield data from a larger pool of participants.

The pool of participants also created a limitation to the study. While participants were randomly selected, the majority of those participants came from major metropolitan areas. The majority of participants from major metropolitan areas are not representative of the overall

population of the institution. The lack of diversity in regards to hometown did not allow for any comparison between rural and urban perspectives.

A final limitation of the study was the creation of an untested instrument. The use of new questions that were attempting to link to Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy and Chickering's (1993) Vectors did not always result in the intended effect. Some questions utilized did not connect to either theory or the research questions posed at the beginning of the study. Reevaluating questions and ensuring their connection to the study is an important part of improving the instrument for future studies.

Conclusions

Impressions of campus were mainly being formed through student interactions with the people who are associated with the institution. This means current students, faculty members, alumni, resident assistants, etc. all play an important role in bringing students to campus. The positive experience of an individual has the ability to sway a person toward attendance at an institution. This was true in the cases of several participants who cited family and friends talking about their positive experiences with the institution or knowing a person who had a positive experience while attending. On the other side of this is the ability of one bad experience or interaction with a person associated with an institution causing a potential student to reconsider the decision. Creating a positive experience for those on campus can assist in promoting students to advocate for the university and become part of recruiting new students.

The importance of this lies in reexamining what attracts students to our university and how universities can leave a meaningful impression that can bring students to campus. One area addressed in this research was by Strange and Banning (2001) who talked about the importance of the physical campus. While it remains an important part of creating a welcoming

environment, the emphasis placed on it as a tool for recruitment may be over utilized. As we enter a time when budgets are being cut and enrollment is decreasing, it will be essential to reexamine how funds are being allocated to departments and the areas that are being funded.

The relationships that are formed also have a large impact on the attitude that students bring as they enter the institution. A student who has a negative orientation experience and does not form relationships with current or other incoming students may develop a negative impression of the institution rather early. In the same way, the people being used to recruit students and welcome them to campus also have the ability to create a positive perception, helping students gain connections prior to coming to campus. The creation of meaningful connections prior to arriving on campus is likely to create a more positive perception of campus life.

The topic of physical space was something that came up frequently in the initial interview. The importance of physical space slowly decreased as the interviews continued and participants showed an ability to cope with any discomfort that they were experiencing. Room size and community bathrooms were referenced as major concerns, but each of the four participants discussed adjusting to the living environment. The reason cited by participants for staying or not staying on-campus in future years was based on the relationships they formed or the community they lived. Participants who had connected well with their floor community and building were more likely to want to continue living on-campus. Those participants who had not connected with campus or their building in the same way were found to be more likely to want to move off-campus.

Recommendations

Using the information gathered through interviews provides information that can be used to create change to improve the experience of students. The first area to address is the roommate selection process that takes place. Each student has the option to choose a roommate they previously know. The other option is a random selection based on a series of five questions that include preferences about noise, sleep schedule, use of possessions, guest policy, and study habits. The questions give a general idea about living habits and spaces, but do not fully address identifying two compatible roommates. To improve this process, utilizing a more thorough system of questions could be an important part of the process. Institutions such as Oregon State (<http://oregonstate.edu/>, 2013) and the University of Georgia (<http://www.uga.edu/>, 2013) are using systems that allow individuals to create a detailed personal profile that can be shared with other students who are attending the institution. The students then have the option to review the profiles of others and contact them based on mutual interests. If a student does not select a roommate, their profile is used by university housing and is matched with the most compatible roommate based on that profile. The added detail has the potential to make roommate selections with the most information and has the potential to increase success.

If a system such as this is not self-created a possible avenue to consider is the use of Facebook profiles. The institution being examined has begun this process utilizing a roommate syncing software. The increased popularity of social media has meant a growing number of students are subscribing and creating profiles on websites such as Facebook. Utilizing the detailed profiles already in place and integrating them into the selection process would be an excellent way to use technology that is already available. On sites such as Facebook the information on the profile is accumulated over years and years, giving a person attempting to

select a roommate a detailed history of the person. In addition, the chat feature makes communication an added tool that can be used to exchange information and find out if that person could potentially be a fit as a roommate.

As students take tours of campus they are given the opportunity to see a show room that represents a potential room they could live in. Currently the show room resides in an all-female hall and does not contain the typical amount of furniture/belongings brought by a college student. While the university offers the opportunity for potential students to see actual student rooms during open house days, this perspective needs to be extended during all tours given while students are coming to campus. Creating a realistic sense of what a room will look like allows the potential student to see what current students have been able to do with the space allotted. In addition, the chance to meet an actual student of the university and connect with them by asking questions about a room can assist in that first step of creating positive relationships that can lead to positive perceptions of the university. Selling a student on a fabrication of what university life is like could ultimately damage how their perception of campus aligns with the reality of their experience.

In addition to showing a more realistic space, it would be beneficial to create an avenue for potential students to see rooms utilizing the website. The University of Central Missouri recently added tours of rooms utilizing videos that are posted on the website for each residence hall (University of Central Missouri, 2012). The videos allow potential students to see the different amenities offered by a residence hall, the makeup of a room, and the chance to hear current students discuss their experience within the room itself and the residence hall as a whole. The internet is a powerful tool that allows a great deal of research to be done prior to a student coming to an institution and colleges have a responsibility to put out the most accurate and

detailed information possible for prospective students. However, what is often missing is the human component. Seeing how students actually live in these spaces, providing videos with students speaking about their living environment and experiences could really enhance a website.

A trend that was noted while interviewing the participants was, that some had never stepped foot on the campus prior to orientation. As questions were asked, they were not able to give full answers because they had not toured rooms or knew what campus had to offer. While campus tours, open houses, and orientation provide opportunities for students to see the campus, they do not allow them to experience what it is like to live and attend a college. A potential idea to address this issue is to create an overnight orientation that allows prospective students to stay on campus in a residence hall room, attend a class, and begin to understand the day in the life of a college student. The possibility of matching prospective students up with a current student who can take them through a typical day would allow for the prospective student to see what life as a college student could entail. In addition, the personal attention given to each student shows the commitment that the institution has to showing students the full experience and allowing them to make an informed decision with the most details that can be given. The opportunity to spend time with an actual student also allows for social interactions and connections with current students, potentially give the prospective student a greater investment in the institution.

In regards to orientation itself, the addition of a weekend excursion utilizing a ropes course or other series of teambuilding activities would give students from the same class to get to know each other in a relaxed atmosphere that orientation does not necessarily provide. Utilizing innovation in increasing student interaction has the potential to bring in a new class of first-year students who have begun to develop relationships prior to stepping foot into the classroom. The additional social interactions prior to coming to the university would help students increase their

comfort level and has the potential to create less worry for students about fitting into a university setting or making friends in a new environment.

As we begin to explore the actual opportunities inside the residence halls we begin to see a deficiency of involvement opportunities. Students have only one option of involvement with the residence hall and that is joining the hall council. While some students are enthusiastic about the opportunity to make changes in the hall or program, other students are looking for opportunities that are not provided by a hall council. A consideration to rectify these issues is to begin creating other interest groups within the hall that appeal to the interests of the residents that are living in the environment. A simple example based on student-interest is the increase of video games as a source of relaxation and community building. Utilizing this already built in interest, residence halls could potentially create an interest group around the purchasing of game systems, games, and ways to program utilizing these systems. Allocating funds towards more interests groups within residence halls could increase the pride residents have about living in the hall because they begin to feel invested in the betterment of the community. Each person in a residence hall has something that they can contribute, but not every person has the opportunity or place where they feel they can contribute.

Future Research

Recreating the study with a larger student population is one idea for future research. Increasing the amount of student participants as well as a variety of institutions has the possibility of allowing for greater understanding of how students perceive the residential experience. An increase in the population has the opportunity to create results that are more generalizable and ultimately more useful in providing recommendations to institutions.

While orientation was not addressed directly as a part of this study, participants did identify orientation as a part of their overall adjustment to college, especially in meeting and connecting with others. Looking at how orientation methods work and the implications on student connections with the residence halls should be reviewed to see how and where the two are related and the effects of collaboration between the two areas.

The final potential area for future research is looking at how intentional relationships are formed and facilitated with the residence halls. Understanding how staff can influence the development of residents creating connections and forming relationships in the residence halls would provide the insight that could assist in creating a well-trained staff that is ready to meet the needs of incoming students. Knowing how these interactions and conversations are being facilitated will give insight into the effective methods hall staff are undertaking and how they can reshape efforts to serve the students in the best possible way.

Summary

As students were examined through a series of interviews utilizing Maslow's Hierarchy (1943) and Chickering's Vectors (1993) several interesting conclusions were found. Ultimately, students' perceptions and experiences were linked most to the relationships they formed during the stages of pre-enrollment as well as relationships formed after this time. While concerns about the physical space of campus and safety came up during the pre-enrollment stages, we saw these concerns dissipate as the interviews continued. The constant concern of relationships for incoming first-year students is something that student affair professionals can use to help shape the experience of those students within academics and the residence halls. While future research is necessary to look at the generalizability of the results, the current research provided allows recommendations to be formulated about improving the transition and campus life for incoming

students. As we look into the future of helping students during this transition it will be important to remember the power of relationships and connections made to a university in shaping perception and experience for students.

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Appendix A- Email to Participants

First Contact Introduction format or flyer.

Hello _____,

My name is Chris Hardin and I am a graduate student at Eastern Illinois University. I am conducting a series of interviews to find out the perceptions of the residence halls and how those change over the first six weeks of living in the halls as part of my graduate thesis under the direction of Dr. Dianne Timm.

I am contacting you today to ask for your assistance in completing this project. I am looking to interview first year freshmen who have no prior experience living within a residence hall. The interview process will span the course of three separate interviews. The first will take place prior to you living in the residence halls. The second will take place three weeks after your time living in the halls. The final interview will take place six weeks after you began living in the halls.

Your participation in this study will provide rich data to be used as the institution continues to improve residence hall life for students. I thank you for your time and look forward to hearing your answer.

Thank you,

Chris Hardin

Graduate Student in the Counseling and Student Development Program

Appendix B- Consent Form
Needs Assessment of Residence Halls

I am a student at Eastern Illinois University, and I am conducting interviews for my graduate school thesis under the direction of Dr. Dianne Timm. I am studying the perceptions of residence halls prior to the freshmen year and how those change over the first six weeks living in the residence halls.

During this study, you will be asked to participate in three interviews and answer questions regarding your thoughts on the residence halls. This interview was designed to be approximately a half hour in length. However, you will be encouraged to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

All the information will be kept confidential. Your name and identifiable information will not be shared with anyone and you will be assigned a pseudonym as part of the research process. Only myself and the thesis chair mentioned above will have access to this information. Upon completion of this project, all data will be destroyed or stored in a secure location.

Participant's Agreement:

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

The researcher has reviewed the individual and social benefits and risks of this project with me.

I am aware the data will be used in a graduate thesis that will be publicly available at the Booth Library. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the submission of the project. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to my personal identity unless I specify otherwise. I understand if I say anything that I believe may incriminate myself, the interviewer will immediately rewind the tape and record over the potentially incriminating information. The interviewer will then ask me if I would like to continue the interview.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher (Chris Hardin, cmhardin@eiu.edu, 314-956-5544) or the thesis chair (Dr. Timm, dtimm@eiu.edu). If I have any questions about my rights as a research participant, I am free to contact the chair of Institutional Review Board.

I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview.

Participant's signature

Date

Interviewer's signature

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Interview #1 Questions (Pre-Residence Hall Living)

- 1) Can you tell me about yourself?
 - a. How big was your hometown?
 - b. Did you share a room? Bathroom?
 - c. What was diversity like in your neighborhood? School?
- 2) Why did you choose the institution?
- 3) How far away is the institution from your home?
- 4) How do you think being away from home will be for you?
 - a. What were some positive parts of home?
 - b. What were some things you would change?
 - c. How often do you plan on going home?
- 5) What do you know about living in the residence halls (on this campus)?
 - a. What things have shaped this perception?
 - b. What do you believe to be true and what do you believe to be false?
- 6) What are you most looking forward to in living in a residence hall?
 - a. What is something that excites you about living in the residence hall?
 - b. What is something you are apprehensive about living in the residence hall?
 - c. How will it differ from living at home for you?
- 7) What, if any, concerns do you have about moving on campus
 - a. Do you believe the institution has a safe campus?
 - b. What gave you the impression of a safe/unsafe campus?

8) Is there anything else I should know about you?

Interview #2 (3 weeks into semester- Honeymoon Phase)

- 1) Tell me about your experiences since arriving on campus?
 - a. What are you involved in?
 - b. Who are your friends? Where do they live?
 - c. What have you enjoyed most so far?
 - d. What has been most challenging?
- 2) How has your experience in the residence halls lined up with your expectations?
- 3) How has living in the residence halls compared with your home life?
 - a. What's the biggest difference? What have you done to adjust?
 - b. What the biggest similarity?
- 4) What interaction have you had with people in your community/floor?
- 5) What needs do you feel have been met by the residence hall?
- 6) What needs do you feel have not been met by the residence hall?
- 7) After reading the transcript from our last interview, what has changed since then?

Interview #3 (6 weeks into semester- Mid-Semester)

- 1) After reading the transcript from our last interview, what has changed since then?
 - a. What differences do you see between what you expected and what you have experienced?
 - b. How does this impact your satisfaction with being at this institution and living on campus?

- 2) In our last meeting we talked about your experiences in the residence halls – what would you add to what you have already shared?
 - a. Is there anything new you have become involved with or dropped out of? Why?
 - b. What things have you enjoyed?
 - c. What would you change now that you have been here almost a semester?
- 3) What things could the campus do to create a safer environment for students?
- 4) In our last meeting you talked about the relationships that you had developed with various people. Can you tell me how those may have changed in the last couple of weeks?
 - a. How are you and your roommate getting along?
 - b. How have your past relationships changed (with friends, significant other, parents, etc.)
 - c. Who do you surround yourself with every day?
 - d. Who is most influential in your life right now?
 - e. What campus groups or organizations have you become involved in?
 - f. What led you to get involved?
 - g. How does this impact your residential experience?
- 5) What services on campus and in hall have you taken advantage of? Why?
 - a. How did you find out about the service?
 - b. In what ways does it influence your college experience?
- 6) Anything else to add?